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Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: REVIEW OF RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family (PRODEFA), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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1. FAMILY FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

A system that places people and their human security at the centre of the social development process must necessarily focus on the family, in which most people live their lives. Care, nurturing, food, clothing, housing, education, are functions that the family naturally performs in interdependence and solidarity.

While the family has undergone and continues to undergo fundamental changes, it is still recognized as the first agent of socialization of future generations and, in many societies, as the only supporting institution for older persons and persons with disabilities.

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Obviously, any policies that support the family will have an effect on the way the family can support, help, protect, educate children and young people, and provide for its vulnerable members.

Although in many cases the family can provide a buffer against short-term poverty and unemployment, policies supporting the most vulnerable families are an indispensable strategy in combating long-term and extreme poverty.

Stable families are agents of sustainable social development because of their fundamental role as the intermediate body between individuals and society. Social progress implies the constant and dynamic interaction between family structures and functions and the larger social, economic, cultural and physical environment.

2. THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE FAMILY

2.1.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/142 entitled "Follow-up to the International Year of the Family", paragraph 4, invited the Commission for Social Development to consider how best to integrate the follow-up to the International Year of the Family into its work programme as laid out in Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/60.

In the same resolution, paragraph 5, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive document containing the family-related provisions from the outcome of seven of the most recent international conferences, to be submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session.

It is hoped that the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 will also target family issues (special session - 1996 - of the Commission for Social Development, May 1996, document on the review of the functioning of the Commission: proposals for the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 (E/CN.5/1996/4 and Corr.1)).

2.2. A DECLARATION ON THE FAMILY

Societies worldwide recognize that families have a number of social functions and responsibilities; and that they have corresponding rights. In many instances, these rights are stated, directly or indirectly, in national constitutions and laws and even in international instruments, where, while rights are not worded as such, the concept of right is implied in the repeated affirmation that the family, as the basic unit of society, is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Nevertheless, in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the word "rights" does clearly appear, namely in chapter V of the Programme of Action entitled "The family, its roles, rights, composition and structure".

Already in 1982, several organizations, national and international and even governmental institutions, started to voice a concern about the need for a document, a declaration on the family spelling out functions, responsibilities and rights.

Several drafts were prepared to this end: an ad hoc group of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family worked for seven years and in 1993 reached a consensus on a text entitled "Guiding Principles on the Family"; the International Union of Family Organizations (IUFO) Charter was presented in 1994 to President Mitterrand of France; other national and regional texts have been coming forth in recent years.

The declaration has also been contemplated at the highest political levels, as was witnessed in 1994 during the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly (International Conference on Families).

One measure of the seriousness of the discussion on this subject was the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 47/237 on 20 September 1993, initially recommended for adoption by the Assembly by the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-third session in 1993.

In paragraph 20 of this resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of States members of the Commission for Social Development on the desirability of working out a declaration on the roles, responsibilities and rights of families on the occasion of the International Year of the Family.

In response to that resolution, a note verbale was circulated in October 1993 to the then 32 States members of the Commission, seeking their views on this issue.

Responses were received from eight Governments: those of Belarus, Chile, Cyprus, Germany, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Sweden and Ukraine. Seven of them expressed support for the declaration on the family.

Among other responses, Cyprus expressed the opinion that the Commission for Social Development could undertake the preparation of a draft declaration, to be subsequently submitted to member States; Germany considered the "Guiding Principles on the Family", elaborated by the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, a useful basis for the United Nations declaration; Chile believed that many elements from the text of the regional Declaration of Cartagena, adopted by the preparatory meeting for the International Year of the Family, 1993, could be used for such a declaration.

In our view, the immediate and long-term follow-up to the International Year of the Family offers a suitable and fertile context for the journey to the destination, a destination which could be an integral element of that follow-up itself.

A declaration on the family should clearly support and reiterate the rights of individuals, in particular the hard-gained rights of women. Because the family is a community that individuals freely choose to form, and the family

bond, being a social link, can only derive its origin and legitimacy from the union of free and equal partners.

The perception of the family as a global unit and as an essential part of the social fabric should lead to the conclusion that a specific declaration enhancing the basic role of the family, without distinction as to ethnic origin, creed or culture, would fill the void now existing at the international level.

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FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: REVIEW OF RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

Statement submitted by Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America; HelpAge International; International Council of Women; International Council on Social Welfare; International Federation of Business and Professional Women; International Federation on Ageing; International Union of Family Organizations; Soroptimist International; Zonta International (non-governmental organizations in general consultative status); All India Women's Conference; Associated Country Women of the World; Baha'í International Community; Caritas Internationalis; Foundation for the Rights of the Family (PRODEFA); International Catholic Child Bureau; International Confederation of Christian Family Movements; International Council of Jewish Women; International Federation for Home Economics; International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres; International Federation of Social Workers; International Federation of University Women; International Kolping Society; Italian Centre of Solidarity; New Humanity; Pax Romana ICMICA-IMCS; SOS-Kinderdorf International; World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts; World Federation of Methodist Women; World Leisure and Recreation Association; World Movement of Mothers; World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (non-governmental organizations in special consultative status); International Association of Charities; Catholic International Education Office; European Union of Women; International Inner Wheel; International Round Table for the Advancement of Counselling; World Peace Council (Roster)

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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We, the undersigned international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council,

Encouraged by the frequent and consistent references to family issues in the agendas, plans and programmes of action throughout the seven global conferences of the 1990s, which underline that the family is the basic unit of society, and that its key role in social development should be strengthened by giving it comprehensive protection and support, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members (Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, para. 26 (h)),

Emphasizing that the family, by performing its basic functions, plays a crucial role in the implementation of human rights in the conduct of everyday life, such as the right to food, clothing and housing, medical care, health services, caring, nurturing and socialization, and the right to education, culture and development, all of which are enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,

Recalling that the family in its role as caretaker and protector carries out an overwhelming part of those functions that otherwise have to be discharged by institutions, and that in providing care to the weaker and most vulnerable members - children, youth, ageing, sick and disabled persons - the family also performs a crucial social function,

Underlining that families are often severely affected by problems of poverty, violence, unemployment, drugs and alcoholic dependence, and by inadequate housing and social services, that migrant, refugee and displaced families must be given special attention, and that the family dimension of these problems should be linked to global issues such as development, social integration, advancement of women and environment,

Stressing that supporting families is not just welfare policy but a long-term social investment which should be placed at the centre of social policy, and that the well-being of families represents in fact the well-being of society,

Believing that family issues should be given the same attention as issues concerning their individual members within the work of the United Nations Secretariat,

Recognizing that, in different cultures, and political and social systems, various forms of family exist,

Adhering to commitment 5 of the Copenhagen Declaration, recognizing that women's strengths and capabilities, including their great contribution to the income and welfare of the family and to the development of society, must be

fully acknowledged and valued, and that a change of attitudes, structures, policies, laws and practices are still sorely needed in order to erase all obstacles to human dignity, while promoting equality and equity so that men and women in partnership can share and reconcile family life and employment responsibilities,

Recalling the objectives of the International Year of the Family, reaffirmed by the General Assembly in its resolutions 47/237 of 20 September 1993 and 50/142 of 21 December 1995, and regretting the lack of any definite plan of action and the insufficient focus on the family within the work of the United Nations Secretariat,

1. Express the hope that the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 will include a review and assessment of the International Year of the Family and that the achievements obtained before, during and after the Year will be built up through a long-term plan of action including an effective follow-up at all levels;

2. Appeal to the members of the Commission for Social Development to give their careful attention to the comprehensive document containing the family-related provisions from the outcome of the seven conferences of the 1990s, as per General Assembly resolution 50/142;

3. Suggest that, as one element of the follow-up to the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, a family dimension should be projected in developmental strategies within all sectors, so as to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the impact of such strategies on families;

4. Stress the necessity for and value of formulating and adopting a declaration on the family spelling out its functions, rights and responsibilities, in the spirit of the 1993 Malta Statement of non-governmental organizations.

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FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: REVIEW OF RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Preparations for the 1999 International Year of Older Persons

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) has more than 30 million members over age 50, 50,000 of whom live in 152 countries throughout the world. AARP's motto is, To serve not to be served, which is fulfilled by the thousands of older volunteers who carry out AARP's programmes. AARP is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

In 1995, our statement to the Commission for Social Development (E/CN.5/1995/NGO/2) commented on the conceptual framework and preparation and observance of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons. We also commented on our COALITION 99, as a communications vehicle for the Year. We are pleased to indicate that we currently have 457 organizations worldwide sharing

* E/CN.5/1997/1.

information on plans and programmes not only for 1999, but also for the 1 October International Day of Older Persons celebrations each year.

This year we would like to speak about the theme "Towards a society for all ages". We would like to call the Commission's attention to the fact that, although there are two generations that can be called "vulnerable and dependent", the very young and the very old, it is almost always only older people, and some of them not so old, who are described in this manner. We think this is a mistake, a stereotype that has to be overcome.

We wish to also direct the Commission's attention to the importance of the issue of what happens to the very young in terms of health care, nutrition, access to clean drinking water and so forth, and the clear impact that these factors have on them as they age. Therefore, if we are to honour the theme for the International Year, with respect to fostering a multigenerational society, then we must not segregate older persons but mainstream them. There is a clear need to look at people's life cycles in order to increase the possibility of a healthy and active old age. By doing so, all generations will benefit.

Societies around the world are ageing. The developing as well as the developed countries will experience the greying of their population. Organizations, including the United Nations, societies and Governments must find a way to utilize the resource that older persons represent, the knowledge that they can bring to bear in finding solutions to the challenges facing us all; but we must also look at how we can improve each generation's chances to achieve a healthy, active old age and we must begin by erasing the stereotype that describes older persons as "frail, dependent and vulnerable". Of course, this phrase can describe some people at all stages of the life cycle, but such a stereotype serves only to isolate not to integrate older persons into society.

AARP, in collaboration with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat will shortly be embarking on a worldwide poster competition whose theme will be "Towards a society for all ages" and which is aimed at engaging peoples of all ages worldwide. This along with COALITION 99 is another commitment AARP is making to the 1999 International Year of Older Persons.

AARP requests the Commission for Social Development, in its preparations for the 1999 International Year of Older Persons, to uphold the theme "Towards a society for all ages", so as to foster a multigenerational society. The 1999 International Year of Older Persons will provide an opportunity to make a lasting difference in terms of how societies and individuals integrate their ageing populations.